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House of Representatives

COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION ACT OF 2003

HON. BOB FILNER
OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MR. FILNER: Mr. Chairman, I thank the chairman of our subcommittee, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. LOBIONDO); the ranking member of our committee, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR); and the chairman, the gentleman from Alaska (Mr. YOUNG), for bringing us this legislation--and that I was proud to work on it with them. It is a culmination of our work this session examining the Coast Guard mission, with particular emphasis on the funding for the Maritime Transportation Security Act of 2002.

This bill, H.R. 2443, authorizes \$7.1 billion, and we hope that this will be sufficient funding for the Coast Guard to carry out the many missions that Congress has given the Coast Guard, including homeland security, search

and rescue, marine safety, drug and migrant interdiction and law enforcement.

H.R. 2443 authorizes \$39 million for a squadron of what are called HITRON armed helicopters for the west coast. The gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR) talked about return of investment on this bill. Well, that is true, certainly, of this HITRON helicopter. Since their establishment, the Jacksonville, Florida, HITRON squadron has stopped over \$1.5 billion in illegal drugs from entering the United States.

Deployment of the HITRON squadron on the west coast will help stem the flow of illegal narcotics through the eastern Pacific Ocean. If one were to look at this using a cost-benefit analysis, \$39 million is spent

(over)

for the armored HITRON squadron on the west coast, but drugs that are stopped and interdicted are worth more than 20 times that amount.

It is my strong view that the Coast Guard must increase Airborne Use of Forces assets for port security and drug interdiction. The lease option for these aircraft is already in place. The lease provides anti-terrorist and anti-drug coverage for the next 3 to 5 years while providing flexibility for the Coast Guard to engage in competition to select a permanent multi-mission cutter helicopter to meet our challenges post-9/11. When these multi-mission

helicopters are deployed, the HITRON helicopters can be returned to their manufacturer at the option of the Coast Guard.

There are a number of changes to existing law, which the previous speakers have spoken to. I would again like to thank the members of the committee for their bipartisan effort to put this bill together and look forward to working with them as we work with the Senate to reach an agreement on the authorizing legislation.

Mr. Chairman, I urge my colleagues to support passage of the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Act.